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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [CVIS](#) [EG](#)
SUBJECT: EGYPT: FOREIGN MINISTER ABOUL GHEIT DISCUSSES
AFRICA, PERCEPTIONS OF THE U.S. WITH CODEL JOHNSON

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Sensitive but unclassified, not for Internet distribution.

11. (SBU) Summary: Egyptian Foreign Minister Ahmed Aboul Gheit highlighted Egypt's "energetic" Africa policy in a January 6 meeting with the DCM and a CODEL led by Representative Eddie Bernice Johnson (D-TX). Both Aboul Gheit and the CODEL confirmed the importance of a good U.S.-Egypt bilateral relationship. Aboul Gheit described the challenges to that relationship as being an "agitated" U.S. policy since 9-11, and mentioned visa restrictions as a particular problem for the U.S. image in Egypt. End summary.

12. (SBU) Egyptian Foreign Minister Ahmed Aboul Gheit opened his January 6 meeting with the DCM and a CODEL led by Representative Eddie Bernice Johnson (D-TX) by thanking the members for visiting Egypt as part of an African tour, as it highlights that Egypt and North Africa are an integral part of the African continent and not just the Arab world. CODEL Johnson included Representative Johnson, Representative John Boozman (R-AK), Representative Corrine Brown (D-FL), Representative Jerry Costello (D-IL), Representative John Duncan (R-TN), Representative Mary Fallin (R-OK), Representative Tim Holden (D-PA), Representative Carolyn Kirlpatrick (D-MI), Representative Laura Richardson (D-CA), and Representative Nydia Velazquez (D-NY). Egypt was among the first countries to participate in the African Union (AU) and funds fifteen percent of its budget, Aboul Gheit said, with North African countries together funding fully fifty percent of the AU budget.

13. (SBU) Aboul Gheit went on to describe Egypt's "energetic" African policy; Egypt operates 49 embassies and/or diplomatic missions in Africa, second only to the U.S. and possibly China. Over the past twenty years, Egypt has sent more than seven thousand Egyptian dentists, professors, water resource experts, and others to aid African countries under Egypt's African Cooperation Fund, he said. Egypt has also contributed to all UN and AU peace keeping efforts in Africa, and most notably is sending 1300 - 1400 troops for Darfur peace-keeping (reftel). Aboul Gheit noted that Al Azhar University, the premier institution of Islamic learning which is based in Cairo, works in African countries with predominantly Muslim populations to educate African Muslims about Islam.

14. (SBU) Representative Johnson confirmed that the CODEL's visit to Egypt affirms the importance of good relations between the U.S. and Egypt, and asked Aboul Gheit about the U.S.-Egyptian bilateral relationship and anti-Americanism in Egypt. Aboul Gheit described the U.S.-Egyptian bilateral relationship as healthy and mutually beneficial, but said that the Palestinian problem "affects our population" and causes some Egyptians to see the U.S. in a negative light. "America is appreciated," he said, and as an American in Cairo "people will embrace you," but Egyptians are

nevertheless angry about U.S. policies. Aboul Gheit attributed this attitude to an "agitated" U.S. policy since 9-11 and to a perception that the Bush administration has not been active enough on the Israeli-Palestinian issue. He said that even President Bush's new initiative for resolving the Israeli-Palestinian problem is not enough unless "you show respect, equality, tenderness, and the good nature of America" to the world. For instance, Aboul Gheit praised U.S. help to Muslims in Kosovo in the 1990s and contrasted it with current policies, where "you attack villages in Afghanistan and kill 50 children collaterally without apologizing - you need to be more embracing."

¶5. (SBU) Aboul Gheit also seized on difficulties obtaining visas to travel to the U.S. as a particular problem for the U.S. image in Egypt. "You are losing the younger generation" who previously would study at U.S. universities, but now do not due to visa restrictions, he said. The CODEL acknowledged issues with the U.S. visa system and noted that even Switzerland, one of the most stable countries in the world, faces visa problems. Asked if the situation has improved over the last several years, MFA Deputy Assistant Minister for American Affairs Mohamed Aboul Dahab responded that it has, though Egyptians still face problems particularly with quick-turn around issuances for emergencies.

¶6. (SBU) Asked about the Voice of America (VOA) and its role in educating Egyptians about U.S. culture and values, Aboul Gheit said that with satellite television, Egyptians would rather get their news from an independent source, rather than one known to be financed by the USG. Aboul Gheit said that "we know more about you than you do about us," and that this needs to change to further strengthen U.S.-Egyptian relations and U.S.-Arab relations in general.

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¶7. (U) CODEL Johnson did not clear this message.
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